

**Statement by**

**W.E. COLBY**

**Director of Central Intelligence**

**to the**

**House Select Committee on Intelligence**

**3 December 1975**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I welcome this opportunity to appear before your Committee and respond to the testimony presented to this Committee by Mr. Samuel Adams on September 18th.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, I have filed with the Committee a lengthy statement which presents in some detail the Agency's response to the allegations made by Mr. Adams. I would like at this time, however, to make a brief oral statement to the Committee speaking more specifically to some of those allegations.

#### The Conspiracy Charge

In his public writings and in testimony before this Committee, Mr. Adams has charged that CIA conspired with the Department of Defense to produce false and misleading estimates. Or, as he puts it, CIA participated in a cover-up undertaken to produce estimates of Vietnamese Communist strength that would be politically acceptable.

I reject this charge as unfounded and unsupportable.

Let's take a look at the record. The record shows clearly that from 1965 onward CIA consistently advised the senior policymaking officials of this Government that there was a strong likelihood that the official military estimates of the size of organized enemy groups in South Vietnam were understated. The CIA also presented its own independent estimates of the proper magnitude of these groups.

To start at the beginning, Mr. Adams' initial questioning of the correctness of the official estimates was done in his draft report dated 22 August 1966 on "The Strength of the Viet Cong Irregulars." On 26 August -- just four days later -- the CIA in a special assessment prepared for the Secretary of Defense and also sent to the President, the Secretary of State and other senior officials advised:

*"Recently acquired documentary evidence now being studied in detail suggests that our holdings on the numerical strength of these Irregulars (now being carried at around 110,000) may require drastic upward revision."*

Let me quote from other CIA documents:

– On 27 June 1966:

*"If the reports are accurate, and past experience suggests that many of them are, the total number of North Vietnamese troops now in South Vietnam would be well over 50,000 men instead of approximately 38,000 as is now carried by MACV."*

– On 22 November 1966 in a memorandum to Robert W. Komer, Special Assistant to the President:

*"A reappraisal of the strength of Communist irregular forces which is currently underway indicates that accepted (i.e., MACV) estimates of*

*the strength of Viet Cong irregular forces may have drastically understated their growth, possibly by as much as 200,000 persons."*

The same message was conveyed in special reports prepared for the Secretary of Defense in December 1966 and in a January 1967 memorandum prepared by CIA's Board of National Estimates.

In May and June 1967, CIA reports to officials in the State and Defense Departments contained our estimates that the size of organized Viet Cong manpower was on the order of 500,000.

The May 1967 report – a special assessment prepared for Secretary McNamara – explicitly outlined our differences with each of the components in MACV's Order of Battle and concluded:

*"... we believe the Viet Cong paramilitary and political organization is still probably far larger than official US order of battle statistics indicate ... . Thus, the overall strength of the Communists organized force structure in South Vietnam is probably in the 500,000 range and may even be higher."*

The 500,000 figure presented by the CIA in this report could be compared with an official military number at that time of 292,000.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that these quotations from official CIA publications show clearly that the CIA did not shrink from pushing the case for higher figures and made no attempt to produce "politically acceptable" estimates.

#### The Order of Battle Conference in Saigon

Much of Mr. Adams' case seems to hinge on his charges that the CIA "sold out" or "caved in" at the order of battle conference held in Saigon in September 1967. A few observations about this conference are in order.

The final agreed figures resulting from the conference, particularly those for the VC/NVA combat forces, represented a significant move on the part of MACV, most notably regarding the category of Administrative Services or Support groups.

In regard to the Irregular Forces, it is true that the conference agreed that they could be removed from the conventional order of battle. The significant point to note here is that even though they were not quantified, we had produced a National Intelligence Estimate, in which the military concurred, which acknowledged these Irregular Forces to be a very sizable factor in total enemy capabilities and one with which senior policy levels of this Government should be greatly concerned. To illustrate this point, I should like to quote from that estimate.

After noting that the VC/NVA Military Force is estimated as "at least 223,000-248,000" the estimate makes this key judgment:

*"It must be recognized, however, that this Military Force constitutes but one component of the total Communist organization. Any comprehensive judgment of Communist capabilities in South Vietnam must embrace the effectiveness of all the elements which comprise that organization, the total size of which is of course considerably greater than the figure given for the Military Force."*

I don't suppose the results of the Saigon order of battle conference were completely acceptable to any of the parties. The military had a point in its argument that their concern was with the combat threat represented by the order of battle in the classic sense. CIA had a point, namely, that a responsible national intelligence assessment of enemy capabilities would have to include consideration of the much broader insurgency threat represented by all organized political, military and quasi-military groups.

Mr. Adams was never able to make or to appreciate this distinction. He always seemed, and apparently still seems, to persist in lumping all of these disparate groups together into a total number of 500,000 or whatever its size and to describe this aggregate as the enemy army. His persistence in this position is what led one observer to say of the September 1967 conference that it produced more heat than light.

Thus, I find it difficult to perceive the conference as the cover-up or sell-out claimed by Mr. Adams. CIA continued to maintain its independence on the question of enemy strengths. In an effort to make its judgments more effective and more persuasive, CIA created in August 1967 a new unit to concentrate more resources on the problem, particularly the more important question of the general

adequacy of Vietnamese manpower resources and their ability to continue with the war.

It is true, as Mr. Adams states, that in December 1967 CIA prepared a special report for Secretary McNamara which used the numbers for Military Forces agreed at the Saigon conference and used in the estimate. We do try to live up to our agreements. Mr. Adams fails to point out, however, that in that same report CIA noted that the estimates for Military Forces did not include other sizable components (the self-defense or Irregular Forces) in the Communist structure. Mr. Adams also fails to note that by February 1968 CIA and DIA had produced a joint memorandum in which a CIA estimate of the size of a total insurgency base in South Vietnam of 500,000 persons was used. The Joint Staff concurred in this memorandum and General Wheeler sent it to the Secretary of Defense.

### The Tet Offensive

In his testimony regarding the performance of the Intelligence Community prior to the Tet Offensive, Mr. Adams maintains that the Intelligence Community was caught by surprise by the Tet Offensive and that this surprise was due to the fact that the Community had so denigrated the size of the Viet Cong that we simply could not have predicted the scope of the Tet attack. He then goes on to make rather sweeping claims that the losses of thousands of American lives and hundreds of military aircraft were due to the poor performance of the Intelligence Community.

I have already provided the Committee with a copy of a post-mortem done in 1968 by the Intelligence Community on its performance at the time of the Tet Offensive. This report acknowledges quite frankly that warning of the Tet

Offensive had not fully anticipated the intensity, coordination and timing of the enemy attack. But the report found quite unequivocally that clear warnings regarding the imminence of an offensive - whether it would occur just before, or just after, or during Tet - were sufficient that the military command in Saigon, on the basis of these intelligence reports, was able to take alerting measures throughout the country.

I would submit that rather than being the cause of the loss of thousands of lives and hundreds of planes, the Intelligence Community provided the warnings that enabled the military commands in Vietnam to meet and to defeat the enemy forces during the Tet Offensive and to minimize losses of lives and resources.

I would submit, moreover, that it was in large part due to these intelligence warnings that the Vietnamese Communists failed to attain their goal of a decisive victory for the Communist cause. The fact of the matter as we look back in history is that the Tet Offensive was a calamitous setback for the Communist forces in 1968.

### The 30,000 Agents

Mr. Adams makes much of his role in the production of a CIA estimate that the Viet Cong had 30,000 agents in the South Vietnamese government and army. His testimony gives the impression that Agency work on this subject was almost exclusively an Adams' effort. He also makes the assertion that his estimate of 30,000 agents should be compared with an official estimate on the part of CIA's Directorate of Operations of only 300 agents. Finally, he asserts that the Agency attempted to suppress the report.

I should like to make a few comments on these statements:

First, I would observe that Mr. Adams' testimony about his famous estimate of 30,000 agents reflects his well-known tendency to make sweeping and unqualified generalizations. Mr. Adams fails to note or to inform his audience that the text of a CIA report he drafted made it quite clear that the total numbers presented were to be viewed only as "a broad order of magnitude." The basic question that had to be answered was, "What is an agent?" Even by Mr. Adams' own description of the network of agents, when he separated "fencesitters" or people with varying degrees of sympathy for the Communist cause, his estimate of hardcore effective agents amounted to only some 10% of the total, that is, 3,000 rather than 30,000.

Mr. Adams was the principal analyst in the Intelligence Directorate working on this problem. The effort to publish finished intelligence on this subject was modest, but it was consistent with the availability of the data to be exploited. More to the point, other parts of the Agency were more directly concerned with the question of Communist subversion. During the same period in which Mr. Adams was doing his work, our Station in Saigon had 14 people assigned to this activity. They were backstopped by a five-person team in CIA Headquarters.

The 30,000 vs. 300 score that Mr. Adams recounts is wrong. The fact is that the Agency estimate of 30,000 was a fully coordinated report which had been concurred in by all parts of the Agency, even that part which Mr. Adams claims to have identified only 300 agents.

In regard to suppression of the report, I can only state most forcibly that there was no suppression of the report. The fact of the matter is that it took Mr. Adams well over 18 months from the initiation of his report to the completion of a draft that would meet minimum Agency standards regarding the organization of reports, the quality of their writing, and the consistency and the soundness of the analysis and evidence used in making the judgments presented in the report.

#### Other Aspects

Mr. Chairman, I would like to speak very briefly to two other points made by Mr. Adams in his testimony. Mr. Adams' testimony gives the impression that he was the only analyst in CIA working on the Viet Cong and that for a period of almost two years he was the only analyst working full-time on the problem.

During the years when Mr. Adams was most directly engaged in making his case for higher figures, the Intelligence Community relied on the Department of Defense, which had the primary responsibility for order of battle numbers. Therefore, I do not find it surprising that only one analyst in CIA Headquarters was working full-time in exploiting captured documents for information on some very specific aspects of this question.

I would like the record to show also that during the 1965-1968 period, when Mr. Adams gives the impression he was going it alone, the number of production analysts working on the Vietnam problem grew from 15 analysts in 1965 to 69 analysts in 1968. I believe that Mr. Adams' testimony on this point and on the significance of his contribution to the intelligence production effort shows a surprisingly dim awareness on his part of his own relative position in CIA and

of the broad range of Vietnam war-related activities on which CIA was conducting research and analysis.

Finally, in his testimony Adams dramatizes his drafting of a memorandum of resignation from the Office of the Director on January 30, 1968, the day of the Tet Offensive. In reviewing the record, I found that Mr. Adams did write such a memorandum, but I also found that his transfer from the Office of the Director had been negotiated almost two months before the Tet Offensive and that he had been in his new CIA assignment a full week before the offensive. This chain of events and the timing of his memorandum raises questions in my mind as to his motives for writing the memorandum.

#### General Observations

Mr. Chairman, I believe that my remarks regarding the testimony of Mr. Adams make it clear that his charges against CIA are plainly and simply wrong. I see little profit in engaging in further argument and recrimination about the Vietnam war. On the whole, I am satisfied that the record of CIA in the Vietnam war is one in which we can all take great pride. There are, however, several observations that come to mind as a result of my study of Mr. Adams' statement and my personal review of the performance of CIA.

First, I would observe that our experience in estimating enemy strengths in South Vietnam is a classic example of many of the intangibles with which intelligence officers must wrestle in their day-to-day job.

Working from incomplete and often conflicting data, the job of intelligence on this subject was also beset with additional and complex methodological and

judgmental factors. These ranged from fundamental conceptual differences on the threat to be measured, to the choice of the proper methods for extrapolating uncertain and fragmentary data. Even if agreements could be reached on the groups to be included, there were problems in deciding on how to measure their strengths, their attrition, or their success in replacing manpower losses. Even if all of the definitional and quantitative factors could be resolved, there were any number of judgmental calls to be made on the qualitative aspects of these forces.

In short, the problem of estimating the numerical strength of many disparate groups of organized manpower, particularly in the context of the Vietnam war, was of necessity a highly imprecise art. Even to this day I doubt that there are experienced observers – in Washington or in Hanoi – who would lay claim to having precise knowledge of the numerical strengths of most of the organized groups in South Vietnam on either side.

The problem for intelligence analysts was further complicated during the Vietnam war by the national obsession for trying to measure the course of the war in numerical terms. As I look back over the past 10 years, I view this infatuation with numbers as one of the more trying experiences the Intelligence Community has had to endure. In the minds of many, the penchant for numbers created pressures which made a task that was at best difficult almost impossible to achieve.

Numbers *were* useful during the war to those of us fighting it, but we had no illusions as to their absolute precision. I personally am less concerned with who had the better numbers than I am with the more fundamental question -- did the CIA do its job?

My answer to this question is a resounding affirmative. CIA did not attempt to sweep numbers under the rug. When it was necessary, the CIA raised questions, debated the issues, and provided its own independent assessments without regard to how they would be received. On some issues we did exceedingly well; on others we probably could have done better.

Whatever the merits of the argument, my concern is that the members of the Executive Branch, the Congress, and, indeed, the American public can feel assured of one fact:

CIA is doing its job. Its analysts are calling the shots as they see them. They do this as professionals in the intelligence business, not to agree or disagree with the desires of policymakers.

Statement on Samuel A. Adams

In testimony before the House Select Committee and elsewhere, former CIA employee Samuel A. Adams has charged that:

- The CIA conspired in some unspecified way with the Department of Defense to produce false and misleading, but politically acceptable, estimates of Vietnamese Communist strength.
- The Viet Cong Tet Offensive in 1968 caught the American Intelligence Community largely by surprise. He claims, ". . . the Tet surprise stemmed in large measure from corruption in the intelligence process."

The CIA denies these charges and believes that an examination of its performance during the Vietnam war will not substantiate them. The record shows clearly that Mr. Adams' views on the size and nature of the various organized Communist groups in South Vietnam were in fact supported by CIA. The record also

December 1975

shows that his comments on the extent to which the Intelligence Community was caught by surprise by the Tet Offensive in January 1968, and the conclusions he draws therefrom, are wrong.

In considering the question of Agency support for Mr. Adams' views, several points should be kept in mind. The Agency's general endorsement of the Adams case was not unqualified. Few, if any, in the Agency believed that Mr. Adams' estimates could be accorded such a high degree of precision as to preclude honest differences regarding their accuracy and the methodologies used to derive them. Even to this date, there is considerable uncertainty about the exact numerical strength of the various Communist groups during any of the war years.

The endorsement of the Adams case also did not mean that the Agency shared fully his interpretation of the significance of the numbers. In his testimony before the House Select Committee and in other public statements on the subject, Mr. Adams frequently refers simplistically to an enemy army of 600,000. This formulation masks the substantial qualitative differences between full-time,

well-armed and well-trained combat forces on the one hand and poorly armed and poorly trained irregular forces and unarmed political cadre on the other. Lumping all of these disparate types together and failing to differentiate between a "combat threat" and the broader "insurgency threat" represented by all organized political, military, and quasi-military groups was as unacceptable to most observers in the CIA as it was to those in military intelligence.

Under the first charge Mr. Adams asserts that the CIA did not give him adequate support in defending his independent estimates of the size of the enemy forces in South Vietnam. Even though the primary responsibility for research and analysis of the Vietnamese Communist order of battle belonged to the Department of Defense and its field commands, the record shows clearly that Mr. Adams was given an unprecedented degree of Agency support for his position.

By his own recounting, Mr. Adams had unparalleled opportunities to present his views. They were given full consideration by the senior line officers in the Agency responsible for intelligence on the Vietnam war. He participated as a member of the CIA delegation to three conferences on the Vietnamese

Communist order of battle. Mr. Adams also had a major role in the drafting of CIA position papers for these conferences and in the drafting during 1967 of a Special National Intelligence Estimate on the military capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists.

The record also demonstrates clearly that the most senior officials of the U. S. Government were alerted by CIA to the nature of the differences in estimates of Communist manpower. On several occasions the Agency provided to these officials its own independent estimates which reflected much of Mr. Adams' research and were significantly higher than those of the intelligence components of the Department of Defense. Some of these documents, or extracts from them, are attached as annexes to this statement.

As Mr. Adams has testified, his initial questioning of the correctness of official estimates of the size of enemy forces was made in August 1966. This was done in a draft report, "The Strength of the Viet Cong Irregulars," dated 22 August 1966. On 26 August the CIA, in a special assessment prepared for the Secretary of Defense and also disseminated to the President, the Secretary of State, and other senior officials, advised:

"Recently acquired documentary evidence now being studied in detail suggests that our holdings on the numerical strength of these irregulars (now being carried at around 110,000) may require drastic upward revision."

In January 1967 CIA's Board of National Estimates prepared a special memorandum on the Vietnam war which was disseminated to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and other senior officials. This memorandum states:

"For some years it has been estimated that there were about 100,000-120,000 irregulars, but there is now documentary evidence which strongly suggests that at the beginning of 1965 irregular strength was about 200,000 and that the goal for the end of 1965 was 250,000-300,000. More recent documentary evidence suggests that this goal was probably reached, at least during 1966."

Clearly, these and other assessments show that the CIA did not shrink from pushing the case for higher figures and made no attempt to produce "politically acceptable" estimates. From

August 1966, until the agreement reached at the Order of Battle Conference in Saigon in September 1967, papers produced by the Agency giving its independent assessment consistently carried the higher strength figures.

The Order of Battle Issue

The debates within the Intelligence Community about the strength of Communist forces centered on two questions--the quantification of the various organized groups of Communist manpower, and the determination of which of these groups should be included in the official order of battle.

The complexity of the issue is reflected in Mr. Adams' own estimates throughout the period. In December 1966, by his own recounting, he estimated the size of enemy forces at 600,000 or more than twice that of the official military estimates. After a study trip to Vietnam in May of 1967, Mr. Adams revised his estimates downward to a total of 500,000. This figure of 500,000 was used in the initial CIA draft of a Special National Intelligence Estimate prepared in the spring and summer of 1967.

During the process of coordinating this draft estimate, the figures were revised slightly and by August of 1967 the draft

estimate showed a total figure for enemy manpower of 431,000 to 491,000. Mr. Adams played a major role in the refinement of these figures which were used by the Washington delegation to the order of battle conference held in Saigon in September 1967. Mr. Adams was a member of that delegation and argued for the figures in the discussions with MACV. As shown in the attached table, the Washington figure of 431,000 to 491,000 compared with a MACV figure of 298,000.

It will be seen from the table that the two most contentious categories were Administrative Services (support) troops and the category of the Irregular Forces. In each instance, neither party to the conference was able to convince the other of the validity of its case.

Regarding the Administrative Services category, it was agreed that the quantification--35,000 to 40,000--required textual qualification in the estimate. The final draft of the SNIE acknowledged explicitly that we lacked confidence in the total size of this category at any given time, but that it was "at least 35,000 to 40,000". In addition the SNIE pointed out that almost anyone under VC control could be impressed into service to perform the administrative service functions.

The conference was unable to reach agreement on the size of the Irregular Forces. MACV argued that these forces should not be included in a military order of battle and that in any event there was not sufficient knowledge to quantify them.

The Washington delegation agreed that the Irregular Forces were so poorly armed and sketchily trained that they did not constitute an integral part of the conventional combat threat.

The Washington team nevertheless insisted that Irregular Forces should be included in any national intelligence assessments of overall enemy capabilities, both political and military.

The conference agreement not to quantify the Irregular Forces also reflected the general acknowledgment that our information on these forces was such that we could not estimate their size with sufficient confidence. Mr. Adams did not agree with this. The SNIE made it clear, however, that these Irregular Forces were a substantial factor in Vietnam. The SNIE stated that in early 1966 the size of the Irregulars could have been on the order of 150,000 persons. Although allowing for some attrition, the language of the estimate made it clear that they still constituted a substantial element in the Communist effort.

In regard to the other categories, particularly those making up the VC/NVA military force, it should be noted that the final figures agreed at the conference and those used in the final draft of the SNIE were well within the range of the figures used to establish the position of the Washington community on this question. Moreover, the agreed figures for these categories also show an acceptance by MACV of a range significantly higher than the estimate it had submitted at the conference.

Thus, the agreements reached at Saigon were far from the cover-up or sell-out claimed by Mr. Adams. The results of the conference did not endorse the initial position of any party. They reflected the lack of definitive data, different methodologies, and differing concepts as to the types of organized groups and how they should be presented in the SNIE. In any event the different views were fully aired and were made widely known to all concerned with developments in Indochina.

The Saigon conference did demonstrate the need for better data and for more persuasive analysis by the various components of the Intelligence Community if differences between Washington and

MACV were to be narrowed. An added impetus to the need for more research on Vietnamese Communist manpower was the growing interest in Washington in measuring the impact on enemy capabilities of extremely high rates of attrition. The debate about numbers and their accuracy was being overshadowed by a much more critical national intelligence question. Did the Vietnamese Communists have adequate manpower resources to replace their combat losses and to maintain a viable military force?

In August 1967 CIA established a new branch to concentrate more resources on this problem. In addition to mounting a more intensive research program on broader manpower questions such as recruitment, infiltration, deserters and defectors, the CIA now became directly involved in independent order of battle research and analysis. Before this time, order of battle analysis was the primary responsibility of military intelligence. Among the analysts assigned to the task was Mr. Adams who, with his colleagues, produced within a few months a new series of estimates as the basis for another order of battle conference called at CIA

initiative and held in Washington in April 1968. This conference also failed to achieve agreement between Washington and Saigon for many of the same reasons which prevented agreement during the conference held in September 1967. The conference did, however, narrow the differences between the CIA and the military numbers.

Even though CIA was unable to obtain military acceptance of its estimates of organized Communist forces in South Vietnam, CIA did not attempt to mask the fact that there were differences or to keep from the policymakers an understanding of the magnitude and nature of the differences. The CIA continued to make its case for higher figures. A CIA assessment prepared for Secretary of Defense McNamara in December 1967, for example, used the numbers agreed at the order of battle conference held in Saigon, but also expressed our concern that the numbers were too low and did not include other sizeable components in the Communist force structure. Moreover, in February 1968 a joint CIA/Joint Staff/DIA memorandum used the independent CIA estimates for the size of the Communist manpower base in South Vietnam. This

estimate--500,000--was compatible with the views of Mr. Adams. The memorandum was transmitted to the Secretary of Defense by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Tet Surprise

In making his charges regarding the surprise of the Washington community at the time of the Tet Offensive, Mr. Adams states that this surprise stemmed from corruption in the intelligence process. He also stated that both his belief and the evidence would show ". . . that American intelligence had so denigrated the Viet Cong's capabilities that we simply could not have predicted the size of the Tet attack".

The question of the performance of the Intelligence Community in providing warning of the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam in January 1968 was the subject of intensive investigations within the Intelligence Community. The report resulting from these investigations has been made available to the House Select Committee.

In 1968, shortly after the Tet Offensive, at the request of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, CIA Director Helms appointed a working group chaired by his Deputy Director for Intelligence and including representatives from CIA, DIA, INR, NSA, and the Joint Staff. This group examined the raw intelligence information received and the intelligence summaries and judgments reported on in the period immediately prior to the Tet Offensive and also visited Vietnam to be joined there by observers from CINCPAC, MACV, and the CIA Station in Saigon.

The working group found that the Intelligence Community-- both in Washington and in Saigon--had reported that the enemy was preparing for a series of coordinated attacks probably on a larger scale than ever before. The final results of this group's investigations acknowledged that warning of the Tet Offensive had not fully anticipated the intensity, coordination, and timing of the enemy attack.

On the question of timing, the working group found that both the analysts in Washington and the field commanders in Saigon believed that the enemy would most probably attack just before or just after the Tet holiday. Nevertheless, the clear warnings regarding the imminence of an offensive--whether it would occur just

before, just after, or during Tet--were sufficient for the military command in Saigon to take alerting measures throughout Vietnam. Although these measures varied in effectiveness from area to area and among units, they were sufficient to reduce considerably the impact of the enemy offensive.

If the Intelligence Community's performance in warning of the offensive was as dismal as Mr. Adams maintains, the loss of American lives and military equipment would have been significantly greater than actually occurred. Moreover, the fact that intelligence provided this warning was not an insignificant factor in the failure of the Vietnamese Communists to attain their goal of a general uprising that would result in a decisive victory in the shortest possible time.

In Mr. Adams' view the Intelligence Community did not provide ample warning of the Tet Offensive simply because its estimates of enemy manpower were so low that they led the community to misjudge the Viet Cong's capability to mount such widespread attacks. This argument is largely spurious. Throughout the Intelligence Community and at the highest policymaking circles of this Government, there was an awareness of substantial differences in estimates of enemy strength in South Vietnam and there was also

an awareness that the CIA estimates of the total enemy threat were considerably higher than those maintained by MACV. Even if the only estimates of enemy strength were those of MACV--the lowest available--they were well within the numbers required for the Viet Cong to mount the Tet Offensive. Studies made after the Tet Offensive both by CIA and other members of the Intelligence Community showed that the Communists committed some 75,000 to 85,000 of their military forces in the Tet Offensive. The capability to commit this many troops was well within existing estimates. This was true whether one's perception of the strength of the VC/NVA military force was based on the lower figures held by MACV or the higher figures held by CIA.

There was also a universal consensus that, whatever their number, the attacking enemy units were almost without exception those of the VC/NVA regular military forces. The role of the Irregular Forces--the main component accounting for Mr. Adams' larger estimates--was seen to be marginal.

Analytical Effort on the Vietnam War

In addition to the broad allegations discussed above, Mr. Adams' testimony gives a distorted impression of the scope of the analytical effort on the Vietnam war. In addition to claiming that he was the Agency's principal analyst on the Viet Cong, he makes a further assertion that for two years he was the only analyst working full time on the problem.

Mr. Adams' testimony on this point reflects a surprisingly dim awareness of his own relative position in CIA and of the broad range of Vietnam-war related activities on which CIA was conducting research and analysis.

In CIA, two components of the Directorate of Intelligence--the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) and the Office of Economic Research (OER)--shared the primary responsibilities for producing intelligence on the Vietnam war. During the years 1965-1968 when Mr. Adams was most directly engaged in making his case for higher figures, the number of personnel in these offices working full time on the Vietnamese war grew from 15 analysts in 1965 to 69 analysts in 1968. In addition CIA's Office of National Estimates had a small staff

responsible for integrating Community inputs into National Intelligence Estimates or special assessments related to the Vietnam war. The DCI's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs also maintained a large staff responsible for coordinating the Agency's analytical and operational activities associated with the war.

Numbers aside, Mr. Adams' testimony might have been more accurate if he had stated that he was the only person in CIA working essentially full time on the exploitation of captured documents specifically for information on the size and structure of Vietnamese Communist military organizations. As noted before, the Department of Defense and its field commands had the primary responsibility for estimates of these military intelligence matters.

At the same time Mr. Adams was exploiting these documents for his narrowly defined purposes, they were also studied and analyzed by the dozens of analysts reporting on a wide range of activities. These included political and military developments throughout Indochina; detailed studies of the Communists' logistic and personnel infiltration systems; and analyses of the effects of the

bombing; reporting and analysis of Vietnamese manpower resources; and a variety of topics related to domestic economic, and foreign trade relationships.

In sum, the responsibilities of the intelligence analysts in CIA during the course of the Vietnam war were far-ranging and demanding. In this context, and given the fact that responsibility for detailed order of battle analysis was not that of the CIA, it cannot be viewed as surprising that only one analyst was assigned a related responsibility on a full-time basis. As stated previously, when the question of Vietnamese Communist manpower acquired a truly substantive significance in terms of assessing Vietnamese ability to continue with the war in view of the high loss rates they sustained, the CIA created a special unit of 8 analysts to work on all aspects of Vietnamese manpower, including order of battle.

The 30,000 Agents

Mr. Adams makes several references in his testimony before the House Select Committee to his role in 1970 in producing a CIA memorandum reporting that the Viet Cong had 30,000 agents in the South Vietnamese Government and Army. His testimony gives the impression that Agency work on this subject was almost exclusively an Adams effort, and, further, that the Agency attempted to suppress the report.

Public discussion of the Agency estimate that there were 30,000 Viet Cong agents is not novel. The substance of the initial memorandum reporting these numbers leaked to The New York Times shortly after its publication in 1970. Mr. Adams also discussed this estimate and his role in its production with the press when he resigned from the Agency in 1973. The subject was also treated in the Adams' article published by Harper's magazine in May 1975.

Mr. Adams' discussion of this topic reflects some of the same kinds of deficiencies apparent in his recounting of his role in estimating enemy strengths. The most notable of these are his tendency to claim almost exclusive personal credit and his penchant for reaching highly simplistic judgments and conclusions.

Mr. Adams was not as he claims ". . . the first person ever to attempt to count spies or even to estimate the size of the problem". The effort to publish finished intelligence on this subject was admittedly modest but consistent with the availability of the data to be exploited. The question of Communist subversion was of more concern in the operational components of the Agency. During the 1969-1970 period the CIA Station in Saigon had 14 personnel assigned to counterintelligence activities. This field effort was backstopped by a five-person team in CIA Headquarters who spent full time providing analytical and other support to Saigon Station's Counterintelligence Program.

In describing the 30,000 agents as ". . . the biggest espionage network in the history of mankind," Mr. Adams again shows his tendency to make sweeping generalizations. In the official Agency publications regarding these estimates, for example, the text makes it quite clear that the total number must be viewed only as a broad order of magnitude. The basic question was, "What is an agent?" Most of the people included in the Adams estimate were not highly trained and dedicated agents. In a country torn

apart for years by revolution and war, it was inevitable that divided loyalties would result from divergent nationalistic, ideological and familial factors. Thus, the bulk of the 30,000 agents were in fact "fence-sitters" or people with varying degrees of sympathy for the Communist cause. By Mr. Adams' own analysis, the number of hard core agents amounted to some 10 percent of his estimate.

Mr. Adams testifies that he had to go outside channels to get a draft of this estimate to consumers in the White House. Mr. Adams fails to report that 18 months transpired from his initiation of the report to its completion. This time was required for the completion of several drafts in an attempt to get a product from Mr. Adams that would meet minimum Agency standards regarding not only the organization of reports and the quality of the writing in them, but more importantly the consistency and soundness of the analysis and the evidence for making the judgments presented in the report.

The Collapse of South Vietnam

Admitting that he was testifying only from hearsay, Mr. Adams, nevertheless, probably gave the House Select Committee the impression that the collapse of the South Vietnamese government in 1975 took the Intelligence Community by surprise.

If this impression were left with the Committee, it needs to be corrected. A thorough review of U. S. intelligence analysis in the six months preceding the collapse of the Saigon government shows that it acquitted itself very well.

In terms of its primary predictive responsibility--the intentions and capabilities of the North Vietnamese--American intelligence made a continuous, voluminous and high quality input to U. S. policymakers. The Intelligence Community correctly estimated that Communist forces in South Vietnam were more powerful than ever before and predicted a marked increase in military action in the first half of 1975. The Intelligence Community also predicted

correctly that Hanoi was not planning an all-out offensive for the first half of 1975, but would be quick to go on the offensive if a major opportunity arose. The validity of this last assessment has since been confirmed by statements of North Vietnamese leaders.

The Intelligence Community could not perceive that the major opportunity would be the hasty, ill-planned, and poorly executed decision made by President Thieu on 13 March 1975 to withdraw his forces from large parts of South Vietnam. But once this decision was made, the Intelligence Community was quick to grasp the consequences of its faulty implementation. On 17 March, the Community predicted Hanoi's likely moves to exploit South Vietnam's new vulnerability and clearly identified the factors which could lead to South Vietnam's unraveling. The Community's first authoritative judgment that Saigon's collapse was both inevitable and imminent was made by 3 April 1975.

Approved For Release 2004/05/12 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000400150006-2

The 1967 Saigon Order of Battle Conference

Estimated Strength of Communist Forces in South Vietnam

<u>Category</u>	<u>August Draft SNIE 14. 3/67</u>	<u>MACV</u>	<u>Conference Agreement</u>	<u>Final SNIE 14. 3/67</u>
<u>VC/NVA Military Force</u>				
Main and Local Forces	121,000	119,000	119,000	118,000
Administrative Services (Support)	40 - 60,000	29,000	35 - 40,000*	35 - 40,000*
Guerrillas	<u>60 - 100,000</u>	<u>65,000</u>	<u>70 - 90,000</u>	<u>70 - 90,000</u>
<u>Sub-Total</u>	221 - 281,000	213,000	224 - 249,000	223 - 248,000
<u>Other Organizations</u>				
Political Cadre	90,000	85,000	75 - 85,000	75 - 85,000
Irregulars (Self-Defense Forces ) (Secret Self-Defense Forces) (Assault Youth )	120,000	---	No Quantification*	No Quantification*
TOTAL	431,000 - 491,000	298,000	299,000 - 334,000	298,000 - 333,000

\* To be qualified in the text of SNIE 14. 3/67

---

Approved For Release 2004/05/12 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000400150006-2

ANNEX

Approved For Release 2004/05/12 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000400150006-2

*BEST COPY*

*AVAILABLE*

Some Factors Influencing the  
Vietnamese Communist Will  
To Persist

OER Project 30,1021

12 December 1965

### III. Developments in South Vietnam

#### A. Logistics System

Our previous estimates of increasing internal logistic and distribution difficulties for the Communist forces in South Vietnam are reinforced by recent developments. Every material losses have increased substantially in the last six months. Base areas have become less secure and the VC have been forced to change tactics and plans, to disperse bivouac areas and to increase personal security, guard, and patrol activities. The increasing operations by Allied forces, resulting casualties -- both civilian and military -- have tended to make the local population less willing to provide labor to the VC forces.

A number of recent reports cite food shortages among enemy forces, particularly those located in the central Highlands. One of these reports described an October 1966 meeting of the Economic Affairs Committee in Quang Ngai province, which was held to discuss food shortages. At the meeting it was reported that the collection of paddy from rice growing districts of the province decreased in 1966 by 70-80 percent as a result of the abandonment of fields and damage caused by military operations. The VC Provincial Committee ordered that guerrilla units at all levels increase production by transplanting manioc, maize, and other food plants. Another report noted considerable difficulty in procuring rice in Binh Dinh province due to extensive enemy operations. To alleviate this shortage the Rear Service Section of the Binh Dinh Province Committee had ordered the population living in VC controlled areas to provide a certain amount to rice, bread, dry fish, and salt each week. The Binh Dinh province committee was also allegedly studying a plan to move the rice depots not yet destroyed to more secure areas. In September of this year the VC Song Cau District Committee of Thua Thien province reportedly held a meeting to discuss severe food shortages in areas under their control and at the meeting established rice quotas for each district to fill for one month. These reports do not indicate a widespread food problem but do reflect an apparent inability to move supplies freely.

#### B. The Ground War

During the second half of 1966 the South Vietnamese war continued to become increasingly expensive for all participants. Allied deployments increased according to plan, and the Communist forces (primarily, VPA/PAVN) apparently attempted, and may in fact have achieved parity with the Allied build-up. Communist casualties increased slightly during the latter part of 1966, whereas Allied casualties were down slightly from those losses

suffered during the first six months of this year. In spite of the growing casualty lists it is significant to note that the Communist soldier still clings tenaciously to his ability to satisfactorily perform his duties in combat. Furthermore, in a relative sense enemy troops are currently being captured and defecting at rates essentially equal to those observed in 1965.

### 1. Troop Strength

#### a. Allied Forces

During the second half of 1966 the Allied build-up in South Vietnam went according to plan. US/Third Nation forces grew from approximately 210 thousand at the end of 1965 to some 410 thousand at the end of November 1966. Regular South Vietnamese troop strength during the same period grew from 355 thousand to 380 thousand. Consequently, US/Third Nation ground forces were simultaneously deployed according to plan. In the more crucial measure of the build-up of maneuver battalions, allied forces were also fully deployed according to schedule. Table I below provides a more detailed analysis of the ground force build-up during the June-November 1966 period.

Table I

Planned versus Actual U.S. Ground Force Deployments to South Vietnam  
June-November 1966

(In thousands)

	June July August September October November					
USA	161	160	165	166	212	222
Current Plan	161	160	165	166	212	222
Actual	160	163	177	166	210	220
ARVN	37	39	41	42	44	66
Current Plan	37	39	41	42	44	66
Actual	37	39	32	55	57	62
Total	200	207	216	218	276	288
Current Plan	200	207	216	218	276	288
Actual	204	213	222	212	259	262
Actual as a percent of Planned	97	96	98	90	97	97

~~SECRET~~

### b. Communist Forces

Current estimates of the number of Communist forces stationed in South Vietnam vary considerably depending on the methodology used to derive the enemy order of battle. The differences in estimates are more a function of definition and time, rather than of a substantive nature. USMACV estimates contain an inherent lag. Consequently, the USMACV confirmed estimate of enemy forces in South Vietnam is considered to be the minimum number of Communist troops in South Vietnam.

The ACIE "threat-order-of-battle," on the other hand, conservatively estimates the maximum number of enemy troops currently located in South Vietnam. Although the ACIE estimate does not require an strict a unit identification system as does the USMACV system, over time most of the unconfirmed units listed by USMACV are ultimately carried as confirmed units. Consequently, the ACIE threat-order-of-battle is used as a maximum estimate of the number of enemy troops in South Vietnam.

Table II

Enemy Troop Deployment South Vietnam  
1964-1965

	(in thousands)		
	1964	1965	1966
PAVN	2.3	26.1	42.6-72.0 <sup>a</sup>
VPA <sup>b</sup>	14.3	56.9	61.6
Irregulars	91.0-200.0 <sup>c</sup>	110.0-300.0	110.0-300.0
Total	<u>107.1-257.3</u>	<u>193.0-532.0</u>	<u>215.2-463.2</u>

<sup>a</sup> End of year totals with the exception of November 1965. All figures from USMACV except where noted.

<sup>b</sup> Independent ACIE threat estimate.

<sup>c</sup> Independent CIA/OSI estimate.

Depending on the figures used it is possible to draw two divergent conclusions about the rate of Communist troop build-up in South Vietnam. USMACV estimates indicate that the enemy build-up is falling far short of the buildup to 60 thousand PAVN and 65 thousand VPA troops estimated for the end of 1965. ACIE estimates indicate, on the other hand, that the enemy troop building will far exceed those estimates.

2. Comparison PAVN/VC vs. Allied Troop Ratios  
Detained by Corps Area

Once again, depending on the figures used, the ratio of Allied prisoner battalion strength to regular army troop strength varies considerably. Use of SOICY estimates would indicate that in a relative sense the Allies have put more men into the field in each corps area, with the marginal exception of I Corps, than the enemy in the last 6 months. The use of ADSE figures for the same period, however, leads to an opposite conclusion. Marginal order of battle figures indicate that in a relative sense the enemy has put more regular troops into I and III Corps, equivalent parity in II Corps, and decreased his strength in IV Corps. (See Table III.)

3. Enemy Casualties

a. Casualties

Heavy casualties are considered to be the most significant indicator of the course of the war in South Vietnam. It should be cautioned that these body counts may contain considerable errors such as double counting and the inclusion of civilians. All factors which affect the estimates of front battlefield casualties are shown in Table IV.

4. Communist Troop Performance

In spite of continued allied military pressure the enemy soldier has maintained his motivation on the battlefield. Increases in the number of communists troops being captured and defecting still appears to be attributable to the increasing scale of operations rather than to a significant change in his motivation to fight. No significant relative changes have been detected the rate of enemy defections, capture and weapons loss over the 1964-66 period. It is significant to note, however, that substantial differences do exist in the Communist will to fight within the various corps areas. The I Corps area, with the largest PAVN troop concentration in South Vietnam and a high rate of combat, has the lowest relative rate of desertions and men being captured. Tables VI and VII present these findings below.

III  
Table W

South Vietnam: Ratio of Allied Maneuver Battalion Strength  
to Estimated NVA/VC Mainforce Troop Strength by Corps Area  
1966 (in thousands of men)

	I Corps			II Corps			III Corps			IV Corps		
	USMACV	Confirmed	ACSI									
	June	Nov	Nov									
NVA	10.0	14.1	30.7	23.5	24.1	31.4	4.5	5.4	7.4			
VCMF	8.5	9.0	8.8	12.5	11.2	12.3	23.3	23.1	30.3	18.4	18.3	14.8
	<u>18.5</u>	<u>23.1</u>	<u>39.5</u>	<u>36.0</u>	<u>35.3</u>	<u>46.7</u>	<u>27.8</u>	<u>28.5</u>	<u>37.7</u>	<u>38.4</u>	<u>38.3</u>	<u>14.8</u>
US/TH	17.0	20.0	20.0	22.0	35.2	35.2	15.2	22.4	22.4			
GVN	10.8	11.3	11.3	10.5	11.2	11.2	15.0	16.1	16.1	14.2	14.8	14.8
	<u>27.8</u>	<u>31.3</u>	<u>31.3</u>	<u>32.5</u>	<u>46.4</u>	<u>46.4</u>	<u>30.2</u>	<u>38.5</u>	<u>38.5</u>	<u>14.2</u>	<u>14.8</u>	<u>14.8</u>
Ratio Allied Forces/VC and PAVN	1:6.8	1:7.3	1:1.26	1:1.1	1:7.6	1:1	1:9.2	1:7.4	1:9.7	1:1.29	1:1.23	1:1

Table VII *IV*Direct Battlefield Casualties, South Vietnam

(Rounded to nearest hundred)

VC/PAVN	1965	1966				Cumulative 1966	
		First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Oct-Nov		
	KIA	35,400	13,100	11,900	15,600	11,100	51,700
	WIA*	53,100	19,600	17,900	23,400	15,900	76,800
TOTAL		<u>88,500</u>	<u>32,700</u>	<u>29,800</u>	<u>39,000</u>	<u>27,000</u>	<u>128,500</u>
GVN							
	KIA	11,200	2,700	2,100	2,100	1,700	8,600
	WIA	23,100	5,600	4,800	4,700	4,100	19,200
ST		<u>34,300</u>	<u>8,300</u>	<u>6,900</u>	<u>6,800</u>	<u>5,800</u>	<u>27,800</u>
US/TN							
	KIA	1,400	1,400	1,300	1,400	1,000	5,100
	WIA	6,100	6,900	8,100	7,500	5,200	27,700
ST		<u>7,500</u>	<u>8,300</u>	<u>9,400</u>	<u>8,900</u>	<u>6,200</u>	<u>32,800</u>
TOTAL		<u>41,800</u>	<u>16,600</u>	<u>16,300</u>	<u>15,700</u>	<u>12,000</u>	<u>60,600</u>

\* Estimate derived by applying a 1.5 WIA/KIA factor to VC/PAVN KIA figure.

Table V  
South Vietnam: Estimate of Enemy Losses

	1965	1966
KIA	35,400	56,000
Captured	6,300	2,800
"Chieu Hoi" Military Returns	9,500	12,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b><u>50,800</u></b>	<b><u>71,800</u></b>
Seriously wounded	19,000-30,000	30,000-47,000
Deserters	9,500	12,000
<b>GRAND TOTALS</b>	<b><u>79,300-90,300</u></b>	<b><u>719,800-735,000</u></b>

Table VI  
Aggregate Indicators of Communist  
Motivation in Battle, South Vietnam

	<u>1964</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u> (January)	<u>1966</u> (January)
Captured as a percent of KIA	.11	.12	.14	.20
Weapons loss as a percent of KIA and captured	.22	.29	.42	.26
Communist Desertions (military) as a percent of enemy KIA	.11	.25	.36	.24

Table X-VIIIndicators of Communist Motivationin Battle by Corps Area 1966

<u>Corps</u>	<u>1st Quarter</u>	<u>2nd Quarter</u>	<u>3rd Quarter</u>	<u>X</u>
Captured as				
a percent of KIA	I .08 1	.12 1	.08 1	.09 1
	II .15 1	.17 1	.18 1	.17 1
	III .29 1	.18 1	.15 1	.21 1
	IV .14 1	.12 1	.22 1	.16 1
Chieu Hoi Deserters				
(Military)	I .08 1	.04 1	.07 1	.06 1
as a percent of KIA	II .38 1	.28 1	.34 1	.33 1
	III .36 1	.35 1	.26 1	.32 1
	IV .42 1	.29 1	.39 1	.36 1

C. Viet Cong Manpower Requirements

On the basis of data on the build-up of VC military forces since 1961, we estimate that the total military manpower requirement was in the order of 355,000-370,000 men or an average monthly requirement during the period of about 6,000 persons.

This estimate is based on current MACV order of battle holdings. A re-appraisal of the strength of Communist irregular forces which is currently underway indicates that MACV estimates of the strength of irregular forces may have understated their growth drastically, probably by as much as 200,000 persons. If this be the case, the build-up of Communist forces during the 1961-65 period would have required recruitment at a monthly rate of 9,000-9,500 persons. These requirements are within the currently estimated Viet Cong capability to recruit and train from 7,000 to 10,000 personnel a month. Additional thousands were recruited during the period to form the VC political/military cadre and combat support units which totals from 60-90,000 persons.

The recruitment burden for the Viet Cong has varied sharply during the period, ranging from at least 40,000 a year during 1961-62 to over 120,000 a year in 1965, the year of their greatest force increase and the year during which estimated manpower losses more than doubled.

1965 also marks a leveling off in the estimated build-up of VC regular forces. Although they will increase only by about 5,000 personnel in 1966 the increasing casualties being sustained by the VC will keep the manpower requirement at about 1965 levels. We estimate that Viet Cong forces will suffer total manpower losses of from 90-100,000 personnel during 1966. This yields a total manpower requirement of from 95-105,000 personnel to be replaced. In addition the Viet Cong may be required to provide replacements for a growing number of NVA losses. During 1965 it is estimated that the NVA losses will range from 50,000-55,000, at the same time that the ARVN force level would expand by an estimated 49,000 troops. To meet this requirement the NVA has drastically increased its infiltration of personnel. Estimated infiltration in 1965 will almost certainly exceed 69,000 persons and could be as high as 95,000.<sup>a</sup> Depending on which infiltration figure is reached, the Viet Cong could be called upon to provide as many as 15,000 troops to compensate NVA losses.

<sup>a</sup> These figures are projections based on the current MACV estimates of NVA infiltration in the two categories "assumed" and "possible," through September 1966.

To meet a similar requirement in 1965 the VC had to resort to forced conscription and returns programs but attained a capability to recruit and train some 7,000 to 10,000 personnel a month. Recruitment at this rate is probably close to the maximum capability of the VC. Several constraints continue to place this ceiling on VC recruitment capability. Among them are the increasing manpower losses being sustained by Viet Cong forces, the deterioration of VC political control resulting from allied military operations, and an apparent VC requirement to recruit at least part of the NVA troop losses in South Vietnam.

All of the VC manpower losses do not represent a true military manpower requirement since a large number of the estimated losses are probably civilians -- either innocent victims of military action or labor engaged in logistic support activities and recruited for short-term periods. Some of the manpower losses are undoubtedly compensated by upgrading personnel assigned to irregular units and transferring them to main and local force units.

The most important manpower requirement is to replace the casualties to be sustained during 1965 by VC main and local force units. We estimate that these will be from 35,000-40,000 in 1966. If these regular forces also expand by 5,000 troops during 1966, the manpower requirement for main and local forces alone would be in the order of 3,000-4,000 troops a month.

Replacement at this level is not an enormous quantitative drain on VC manpower resources. Some 30,000 youth annually reach recruitment age in VC controlled areas. The burden is even smaller if the irregular forces total as such as 200,000 persons. The upgrading of irregular forces at a rate of 3,000-4,000 troops a month would probably mean, however, that the VC regular forces will be hard pressed to maintain a high degree of skilled military cadre.

In one of the few captured documents giving meaningful aggregate data on annual recruitment in a VC province, total recruitment in 1963 amounted to 1.5 percent of the total population controlled by the VC. Recruitment specifically for military purposes (including militia and self-defense forces) was just over one percent of the population. Recruitment at this level is undoubtedly far short of the rates needed to meet recruitment targets.\* But even recruitment at these low rates would provide nationally from 35,000-50,000 personnel

\* Some of the recruitment goals are guerrillas: 5 percent of the population in lowland areas, 2 percent in cities and towns and 10 percent in highland areas.

annually, an extent more than sufficient to maintain the force strength of VC main and local force units.

A few isolated reports on recruitment programs indicate that recruitment targets in 1965 were generally fulfilled by at least 90 percent. In Binh Dinh province, for example, the percentage of population joining the guerrilla forces had reached only 3.3 percent of the lowland population and 5.1 percent of the highland population compared to targets of 5 and 10 percent respectively. Nevertheless, captured documents indicate that the province regarded recruitment as having allowed marked increases in the strength of guerrilla and militia forces.